

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Montana State Office

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EMAIL TRANSMISSION – 11/18/05

Instruction Memorandum No. MT-2006-015

Expires: 9/30/07

To: Field Managers

From: State Director

Subject: Montana Range Program Evaluation

DD: December 7, 2005

Program Area: Range Management - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses

Purpose: This Instruction Memorandum (IM) initiates a review of NEPA compliance associated with range management decisions, especially those related to permit renewals and transfers. The intent of this NEPA review is to provide the Montana Bureau of Land Management (BLM) State Management Team (SMT) with information concerning BLM NEPA compliance with technical and administrative procedures during the grazing permit renewal process. This review will assess the effectiveness and efficiency of existing policies and procedures. The review will offer recommendations to assist the SMT and specialists in defining program direction and improving compliance with NEPA. Ultimately, this review will determine opportunities to improve policies, procedures, practices, and training pertaining to NEPA analyses of grazing management proposals and permit renewals. Specific objectives include:

- To determine if the level of NEPA analyses and documentation is appropriate for the grazing permit renewals and other range management decisions.
- To determine if technical program guidance and training are adequate to accomplish program objectives and meet policy direction.
- To determine if field office staff have sufficient knowledge and training regarding NEPA procedures.
- To determine if consistent guidance concerning documentation of NEPA analyses of grazing permit renewals and other range management decisions is appropriate and desirable.

Policy/Action: Each field office (FO) and field station (FS) is asked to provide for review five NEPA documents associated with grazing permit renewals. Please include in these five NEPA documents at least one Categorical Exclusion, one Documentation of Land Use Plan Conformance and NEPA Adequacy and three Environmental Assessments from your Fiscal Year 2005 NEPA Registers. Please send a copy of each document to Lauren Hilger (MT923) by December 7, 2005.

Approximately five resource specialists from each FO/FS will be contacted to complete an electronic questionnaire pertaining to the adequacy of NEPA analysis and documentation. The questionnaire will be sent to each FO manager, who will forward it to five resource staff members of their choosing. We ask that these be completed and returned to Merry Prestridge (MT923) by December 7, 2005.

Subsequent interviews with FO resource specialists will be conducted throughout the review.

The review will conclude with site visits to each FO/FS to meet with managers and range staff to discuss findings, share ideas concerning analyses and documentation, and offer suggestions for increased efficiency.

Time Frame: Time frames are identified above. A summary of review findings are to be available to the SMT at the March 2006 meeting.

Background: This NEPA review responds to preliminary findings and recommendations contained in the recent range program Technical Procedures Review (TPR)/evaluation for Montana (spring 2005) and the federal court decision, Civ. No. 04-0181-S-BLW, to remove livestock off of 800,000 acres of BLM land in southeastern Idaho where it was determined that the BLM did not adequately assess the impacts to sage grouse from livestock grazing.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: None

Coordination: Planning, Range Management, Field Office Managers

Contact: If you have any further questions concerning this matter, please feel free to contact John Thompson at (406) 896-5030 or Billy McIlvain at (406) 896-5028.

Signed by: Howard A. Lemm, Acting

Authenticated by: Merry Prestridge (MT923)

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